Published and Copyright (c) 1999 - 2011
All Rights Reserved

Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

With Contributions by:

Fred Horvat

To subscribe to A-ONE, change e-mail addresses, or unsubscribe, log on to our website at: www.atarinews.org and click on "Subscriptions".
OR subscribe to A-ONE by sending a message to: dpj@atarinews.org and your address will be added to the distribution list.
To unsubscribe from A-ONE, send the following: Unsubscribe A-ONE
Please make sure that you include the same address that you used to subscribe from.

To download A-ONE, set your browser bookmarks to one of the following sites:

http://people.delphiforums.com/dpj/a-one.htm
Now available:
http://www.atarinews.org

Visit the Atari Advantage Forum on Delphi!
http://forums.delphiforums.com/atari/

=~=~=~=

A-ONE #1334 08/26/11

~ Facebook and Drug Use? ~ People Are Talking! ~ Sony’s S1 Tablet!
~ China: Control Content ~ IBM Largest Drive Ever ~ Bomber’s Tech Gaffe!
~ Missouri Teachers Sue! ~ Using Social Networks! ~ Dying in Video Games

~ Social Suicide Painless ~ Impact of Steve Jobs! ~ Atari Alienates Fans!

-* Facebook Re-Tackles Privacy! *-
-* Steve Jobs Resigns from Apple CEO! *-
-* Risk of Online Health Records Is Revealed! *-

=~=~=~=

->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Lions and Tigers and Bears, oh my!! Oops, wrong movie, but the sentiment is nearly correct! It's been one terrible season after another, it seems! Last winter we had record-setting snow storms. This past spring and now the summer, we've had tornadoes, earthquakes - and now Hurricane Irene is fast-approaching the east coast!!

They're still not 100% what path this hurricane will be taking, but at the moment, it seems that it will go farther west than originally thought. What that means for us here in New England is that coastal areas should not feel the brunt of this storm. For "us", it will be more like a tropical storm than a hurricane. Personally, I'm not too excited about the possibility of either one of those scenarios! But, I've lived in New England for most of my life - I'm used to the extraordinary weather that we've become accustomed - even if that weather is few and far between!

So yes, we've started to get a little bit prepared. Most of what we'll do will occur Saturday - we'll take in lawn furniture and various outdoor items that could end up potential missiles; I'll re-secure our pool cover so it doesn't blow off; put away trash barrels and other items so we don't lose them; and whatever else we happen to notice needs securing. Batten down the hatches, as they say!

I have to admit, I'm only a little bit concerned about this pending hurricane or tropical storm - I'm not going to worry about it too much. A little preparation and we'll just ride it out like everyone else. If you're in the path of the storm as well, good luck!

Until next time...

=~=~=~=

->In This Week's Gaming Section - Sony Remodels PlayStation Home!
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Elder Scrolls Skyrim Preview!
Atari Alienates/Persecutes Retro Fanbase!

=~=~=~=

->A-ONE’s Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Sony Remodels PlayStation Home

Sony is remodeling PlayStation Home to put games at center stage in a virtual world that merges console-quality play with styles of social gaming that are hits at venues such as Facebook.

Sony Computer Entertainment America on Tuesday announced that it is remodeling Home, which is used by more than 23 million people worldwide, as part of an evolution from a social network into a social gaming platform.

"We discovered that if you put a lot of gamers in a room together and tell them to get to know each other, they don’t necessarily do that," PlayStation Home director Jack Buser told AFP.

"We find if you put them together and give them a game, they play and get to know each other," he added while discussing the inspiration for the redesign to be unveiled in coming months.

Home launched in late 2008 as an online world in which PlayStation 3 videogame console users represented by animated figures referred to as "avatars" could socialize and play.

"PlayStation Home’s new core experience is a giant leap in the evolution of the platform and its new model quickly deploys our users to many compelling free-to-play games that fit their interests," Buser said.

The Home redesign includes the creation of a "hub" that integrates games, quests, community events, user-generated content, shopping and more.

PlayStation users with be able to "transport" their animated characters to game districts with themes such as action, sports, and adventure.

"Under the hood of all this we will be deploying a quest system that will turn Home itself into a game," Buser said.

Home is at the heart of Sony’s PlayStation Network that lets owners of PS3 consoles access games, films, and other entertainment.

Home has more than 230 titles available and has been incorporating successful social game models such as free play supported by advertising or sales of premium content.

Elder Scrolls Skyrim Preview

For awhile now, the game publisher has been talking about the size of The Elder Scrolls: Skyrim, and comparing it to the last Elder Scrolls adventure, Oblivion. In actuality, the size of the virtual worlds are the same, but with the mountain region of the new game, the way players will navigate the

world will take longer (Oblivion offered flatter terrain for more direct routes). But Skyrim has been designed to offer a larger adventure to gamers in a scope that goes beyond square miles.

Skyrim will offer more dense quests for players to explore through its new Radiant Story System. This technology will serve up random encounters, quests and towns depending on each player s actions in the game and where they are. It should ensure that players will have a very different experience when playing the game, and offer up replay value for those who want to journey back to Skyrim.

Those who played Oblivion may have, on numerous occasions, tired of a quest because the game literally broke the adventure. With so many quests built into that game, once in awhile a quest would require the player to vanquish the very person who sent them on the adventure, thus breaking the chain of the quest. That will never happen in Skyrim.

In Skyrim, the new dynamic system will ensure that even if a merchant originates a quest, which later develops into an adventure from the Dark Brotherhood to kill said merchant, other virtual characters will take over the quest-giver role. It could be a relative or a spouse that steps in so that players can seamlessly finish the quest, rather than being left high and dry after a lot of time invested in that particular journey. The ability to talk to NPCs while looking around and taking in your surroundings further envelopes the player within this universe.

This new mechanic should encourage more gamers to engage in more quests. And Skyrim will come packed with them. In fact, that s partly where the size and scope of the new game comes to play. While getting from point A to point B might take a little bit longer because of the landscape, the developer is also enticing players to experience engaging side quests that should take up a lot of time.

There s also the matter of dungeons. In Oblivion, dungeons were there for those who wanted to grab some loot, but they didn t offer engagement. Part of the reason was that artists created the dungeons in Oblivion. But for Skyrim, each dungeon is being designed by level designers. The end result should be unique experiences complete with back stories that the team hopes will encourage more players to spend yet more time underground, exploring for more than just loot.

One thing you can find in dungeons is ore, which can be used to create custom weapons from scratch. The open world nature of Skyrim is also likely going to make players lose track of time. Bethesda has showed off the depth of this world, which includes the ability to go off and become a specialist in any number of jobs. At E3, Bethesda showed off Riverwood, where players could become a logger and earn virtual currency chopping wood. At Gamescom, the developer talked about how everything in the game can be used to create weapons, potions, and other items that take on an important purpose. Getting back to that ore, players can use a pick axe to collect enough of the raw materials to create a dagger or sword - once they find a weapons forge. Kill an animal, find a tannery, and you have leather, as well as fur. There are plenty of details to play through in this massive game.

Players can specialize in 18 different skills, including one and two-handed swords, archery, enchantment, and heavy and light armor. The sky is literally the limit, as constellations serve as perk trees for each individual skill. There are over 280 perks in the game. Again, plenty to get caught up with as you explore the world.

Getting around Skyrim will be a little bit easier thanks to horses. Bethesda spent a lot of time creating believable animals, which opens up all-new controls that handle a lot different than the on-foot portion of the game. Shown from a third-person perspective, horses allow players to more quickly navigate this huge area.

Built with the Creation Engine, Skyrim is really starting to show off its polish. Anywhere players look in the game world, no matter how far in the distance, is open for exploration. The game s weather system adds more realism to the world, while the real-time shadows brings minute details to life as you explore both above ground and in the dungeons below.

Skyrim remains slated for a November 11 release date (11.11.11) on Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and PC. Bethesda will also offer a $150 collector s edition that includes a statue, art book and ’making of’ DVD.

Why We Love Dying A Video Game Death

It’s not just the fatally perilous adventure, says Maria Bustillos at Kotaku, but the potential for rebirth that keeps us enthralled

What is it about "dying" as a video-game character that leaves us feeling so invigorated, so alive? Winston Churchill - who never played a video game in his life - may have left us a clue when he wrote in 1898, "Nothing in life is so exhilarating as to be shot at without result." It’s this ability to cheat death that attracts many of us to "the adrenaline-pumping sensations provided by video games," says Maria Bustillos at Kotaku. And don’t forget about video games’ "ecstasy of reincarnation. They bring us through death, and to the other side." The best new video games, says Bustillos, actually allow us to recreate the timeless thrill of near-mythic immortality. Here, an excerpt:

GAME OVER used to be a much costlier affair. In the 8-bit days, death meant losing all your character’s attributes, all his jewels, coins, weapons, and experiences. It was in some ways like real-life death (or maybe the Buddhist version of it). You were forced to start over absolutely, from nothing...

[T]oday’s games keep you alive for a lot longer, and the cost of death in general has become relatively slight. Your progress may entitle you to reenter the world at a way advanced level; long investment in a role-playing game is rewarded with a richly developed character that may persist for months or years...

Maybe that’s ultimately just what gaming is for, to give us the thrill without the cost, to satisfy the urge to risk everything, anything, to fall, to drown and burn, to kill and be killed, to explore the dark corners of our own minds, to expiate the sins in our deepest and most frightening part.

=~=~=~=

""""""""""""""""""""

Atari Is Demanding Domain Names from Its Own Fan Sites

In recent years the name Atari hasn t been at the forefront of video games development, but Atari the company seem to be trying to turn that around, albeit with updates and re-releases of some of its classic titles such as the recent Greatest Hits volumes on the Nintendo DS.

In attempting to reinvigorate its brand, Atari have also decided to take action that leaves a bad taste in our mouths: targeting retro Atari development websites and demanding they hand over their domain names.

One relatively high-profile take down has been that of Atari2600.org. It was a fan site and hobby development hub for Andrews Davey who has owned the domain for 11 years. It used to contain his own 2600 games, extensive tutorials of programming the 2600 hardware, as well as promoting the 2600 as a historical piece of hardware.

Unfortunately, all that content has now disappeared due to Atari s demands that Davey is using its trademark and has to remove his content as well as handing over ownership of the domain. Remember, this is a non-commercial site that was promoting Atari s hardware, but that doesn t seem to matter.

The question is, why is Atari doing this now? The most obvious answer is Atari has a number of new releases planned from its existing catalogue of retro games on new platforms. It has therefore instructed lawyers to clean up the web of any Atari domain names it doesn t own in anticipation. A similar targeting of sites offering emulators and game ROMs is also underway, but that s more understandable from a copyright infringement viewpoint.

Hopefully someone high up at Atari will review this action and realize the only thing it is achieving is to take some of the brand s biggest fans offline. These are die-hard Atari geeks, and they are having years of work taken away by a threat from a brand they have supported through the most lean of times. There s just something not right about that.

My suggestion would be for Atari to instead work with these sites. Set them up as official Atari domains, keep all the content, and let the enthusiastic owners continue to promote what they love: Atari.

Atari Continues Efforts To Alienate and Persecute Retro Fanbase

Further to earlier reports of Atari targeting parts of the retro Atari community, Atari have now turned their attention to atari2600.org, a website that has been registered by Andrew Davie, since 2000.

The site has been used by Davie over the years to showcase his non-commercial programming efforts for the ancient Atari 2600 console. The receipt of a letter from Atari’s SVP & General Counsel, Kristen Keller, came as a surprise for the Atari enthusiast, who told Atari User he is "disappointed" at Atari’s approach and is considering his position.

Atari are demanding Davie begin arrangements to handover atari2600.org to them as the domain name contains the Atari brand ("Atari"), in its entirety, in the domain name.

Atari have also recently gone after Starsoft Berlin, a hobbyist site dedicated to producing various demos for the Atari 8-bit computer platform - again a completely non commercial fan site.

=~=~=~=

A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Steve Jobs Resigns from Apple, Cook Becomes CEO

Silicon Valley legend Steve Jobs on Wednesday resigned as chief executive of Apple Inc in a stunning move that ended his 14-year reign at the technology giant he co-founded in a garage.

Apple shares were suspended from trade before the announcement. They had gained 0.7 percent to close at $376.18.

The pancreatic cancer survivor and industry icon, who has been on medical leave for an undisclosed condition since January 17, will be replaced by COO and longtime heir apparent Tim Cook.

"I have always said if there ever came a day when I could no longer meet my duties and expectations as Apple's CEO, I would be the first to let you know. Unfortunately, that day has come," he said in a brief letter announcing his resignation.

The 55-year-old CEO had briefly emerged from his medical leave in March to unveil the latest version of the iPad and later to attend a dinner hosted by President Barack Obama for technology leaders in Silicon Valley.

Jobs' often-gaunt appearance has sparked questions about his health and his ability to continue at Apple.

"I will say to investors: don't panic and remain calm, it's the right thing to do. Steve will be chairman and Cook is CEO," said BGC Financial analyst Colin Gillis.

The Lesser-known Impact of Steve Jobs

Yesterday, Apple co-founder and tech icon Steve Jobs stepped down from his post as CEO of the most successful tech company in the world. His accomplishments are many, and as the boss of Apple he oversaw the launch of hugely successful product lines like the Mac, iPod, iPhone, and most recently the iPad. But while these top-selling gadgets have provided huge

bullet points for Jobs impressive resume, he has made an impact in other ways that aren't often mentioned. Let's take a look back at some of the lesser-known accomplishments of the now-former Apple CEO.

It's a primary input method that we all take for granted, but modern computers owe the popularization of the mouse to Apple's original Macintosh computer. Before the Mac, most computers were controlled simply by textual commands typed in using a keyboard, but the flagship Macintosh 128K changed that. Using a groundbreaking graphical user interface, Mac owners were able to move a cursor around the screen and interact with the virtual desktop. The mouse - which up until this point had been an obscure and expensive accessory - was the perfect piece of hardware to make this new concept work.

Steve Jobs introduced the computer in his first Mac keynote speech, and with the help of the 1984 Apple commercial that aired during Super Bowl XVIII, the company's debut Mac began to build an audience. It wasn't long before Microsoft's Windows operating system arrived on the scene and brought the mouse along for the ride. It's hard to imagine the computer industry without the mouse rising to prominence, and we have Apple, Jobs, and the Macintosh computer to thank for it.

The bane of so many office workers the world over, digital spreadsheets are a crucial part of businesses the world over. These days, spreadsheet programs are capable of a plethora of design and layout options, with more menus that you can shake a mouse cord at. But that wasn't always the case, and digital spreadsheets may very well owe their entire existence to the Steve Jobs and the Apple II.

Before the Macintosh arrived on the scene, the Apple II was the company's most successful computer. It launched in 1977 and featured a floppy disk drive capable of running third party programs. Dan Fylstra, the head of one aspiring applications publisher named Personal Software, began to promote the Apple II to potential developers after receiving a special discount on the development hardware from Steve Jobs.

Shortly thereafter, Personal Software released VisiCalc exclusively for Apple's machine, and the digital spreadsheet was born. The early application was extremely bare bones, and had only a handful of features to speak of, but what it did, it did well. Businesses began to utilize the Apple II to keep track of important information like payroll and expenses, making paper spreadsheets obsolete. VisiCalc was later ported to IBM computers, and is the undisputed forefather of modern day spreadsheet applications like Excel and Numbers.

Steve Jobs didn't make all of his biggest moves with Apple, and the former CEO is one of the main reasons why millions of children and adults around the world are in love with animated films. In 1986, shortly after leaving Apple for the first time, Jobs spent a cool $10 million on a tiny division of production company Lucasfilm that specialized in computer graphics hardware. Jobs paid half of the money directly to founder George Lucas, and spent the other $5 million on the company itself. Jobs incorporated the company, became CEO, and renamed his new project Pixar - after the pricey computer imaging hardware the company produced.

After a lackluster run of devices, Jobs sold the hardware division of the company and focused instead on software. Shortly thereafter, Jobs struck a deal with Walt Disney Feature Animation to produce a trio of animated films. The first of these features was Toy Story, which - from a budget of just $30 million - took in over $350 million. After a series of several

more blockbuster films, Jobs sold Pixar to Disney for an estimated $7.4 billion in stock, making Jobs the largest single shareholder in the company.

These days, the thought of an Apple operating system running on an HP or IBM PC seems absolutely absurd, but in the early and mid 90s, it wasn't odd at all. In 1985, Steve Jobs left Apple due to an internal power struggle with then-CEO John Sculley, and during this hiatus the company made some interesting decisions. One of which was introducing an official Mac OS licensing program in 1995 that allowed other computer makers to run Apple's software, much like the long list of manufacturers that sell their machines with Microsoft's Windows.

They were known as "Macintosh clones," and while the program was initially designed to broaden the market appeal of Apple's products, it enabled competing computer makers to overshadow Apple's own hardware. By selling Apple's OS 7 software on faster computers than Apple was currently marketing, other companies began to dilute Apple's brand. When Steve Jobs returned to the company in 1997, the clone program was one of the first casualties. Jobs believed that the program would never work, and could only serve to hurt the company. Shortly thereafter, Apple released OS 8, which left clone licensees with an outdated product, effectively killing the program. This kept the Apple brand as one cohesive unit, and allowed it to act as an all-in-one company capable of creating world class hardware, as well as the software that runs on it.

Facebook Tackles Privacy Controls, Again

Privacy issues continue to plague Facebook. Most recently it was facial-recognition technology that landed the social-networking darling in the hot seat with privacy advocates.

Still, Facebook is once again up at the plate, looking to hit a privacy home run with watchdogs and consumers alike while still encouraging the ever-important sharing that drives the social network.

On Thursday, Facebook will introduce yet another set of privacy changes that aim to make it easier to share posts, tags and other content with the people you want. Facebook is working to help people better understand, visually, who can see what they post.

"The main change is moving most of your controls from a settings page to being in-line, right next to the posts, photos and tags they affect," said Chris Cox, vice president of product at Facebook. "Your profile should feel like your home on the web - you should never feel like stuff appears there that you don't want, and you should never wonder who sees what's there."

To that end, Facebook user profiles are getting some new tools that hope to give members clearer, more consistent controls over how photos and posts get added to it, and who can see everything that lives there.

For example, photos in which users are tagged now show up on their profile as soon as they are tagged. Users can choose to use a new tool to approve or reject any photo or post in which they are tagged before it's visible to anyone else on their profile.

Facebook also is allowing an option to review and approve or reject any tag

someone tries to add to photos and posts. And a new "view profile as" button lets users see how others see their profiles.

"In addition to the profile changes, it will now be more visually straightforward to understand and control who can see your posts at the time you share them," Cox said. "We're also broadening the functionality of the sharing tool: Now if you want to make your posts more expressive, we've made it simple to add location and tag the people you're with."

Will the changes appease the masses?

Brad Shimmin, a principal analyst at Current Analysis, said Facebook could run into the same old problems it has faced in previous privacy change rollouts As he sees it, Facebook is going about the privacy changes the wrong way - again.

"Facebook is making everyone opt in, in order to make a change to their privacy settings, rather than making these new rules standard and letting people who don't want the changes opt out," Shimmin said. "People are asking for more privacy, but with these changes you have to go in and specify that you want to be less exposed."

There's another danger: Too many Facebook alerts. By opting for individual alerts every time someone tags users in content, Facebook members may get warning weary and shut off the alerts. In the end, they lose out on the benefit of the privacy protection.

"I can see how this approach could be problematic in the long term with so many alerts," Shimmin said. "Remember when Vista came out? When you opened a web page you had to say yes to like four different questions. People became so immune that they just turned them off because they were tired of saying yes."

China Official Tells Web Firms To Control Content

A Communist Party leader has told China's Internet companies to tighten control over material online as Beijing cracks down on dissent and tries to block the rise of Middle East-style protests.

The party secretary for Beijing, Liu Qi, issued the warning following a visit this week to Sina Corp., which operates a popular microblogging site, according to the party-published newspaper Beijing Daily.

Internet companies should "strengthen management and firmly prevent the spread of fake and harmful information," Liu was quoted as saying after the visit Monday to Sina. He said companies should "resist fake and negative information."

Communist authorities encourage Internet use for education and business but are uneasy about its potential to spread dissent, especially after social networking and other websites played a key role in protests that brought down governments in Egypt and Tunisia.

Beijing is in the midst of one of its most sweeping crackdowns on dissent in years and has detained or questioned hundreds of activists, lawyers and others.

The government tries to block access to foreign websites deemed subversive and Chinese operators of websites where the public can post comments are required to watch the material and remove any that violates censorship rules.

The government's censorship rules prompted Google Inc. to close its China search engine last year. Mainland users can see Google's Chinese-language search site in Hong Kong but access is slower and the company's China market share has shrunk.

The report on Liu's warning gave no details of how Internet companies were expected to change their management.

Employees who answered the phone at Sina referred questions to a spokeswoman who did not answer her phone.

With Liu during the visit were Sina CEO Charles Chao and Kai-fu Lee, a former boss of Google's China unit who runs a technology investment company, according to the Beijing Daily.

Chao told Forbes magazine in March that Sina's microblogging site, Weibo, has at least 100 employees monitoring content 24 hours a day. The company said in May that the number of Weibo users had passed 140 million.

Also this week, the Beijing Internet Media Association, a government-sanctioned industry group, called on its 104 member companies to police Internet content, possibly prompted by Liu's order.

"Propaganda guidance to the public should be led toward a correct direction," the appeal said, according to the Beijing Daily. "Online news should be trustworthy and should not spread rumors or vulgar contents."

Liu, the party secretary, also visited the headquarters of Youku.com Inc., a video portal, and talked with CEO Victor Koo, the report said.

China has the world's biggest online population, with 485 million Internet users as of June 30, according to the government-sanctioned China National Internet Information Center.

Meanwhile, a major Chinese Internet commerce platform, Taobao, has told merchants that use its service to stop selling virtual private network and other software that allows Web surfers to avoid government filters.

Taobao, part of Alibaba Group, said it acted after finding VPNs were being used to visit foreign websites illegally. A company spokesman said Tuesday it took the action on its own without receiving government orders.

New Data Spill Shows Risk of Online Health Records

Until recently, medical files belonging to nearly 300,000 Californians sat unsecured on the Internet for the entire world to see.

There were insurance forms, Social Security numbers and doctors' notes. Among the files were summaries that spelled out, in painstaking detail, a trucker's crushed fingers, a maintenance worker's broken ribs and one man's bout with sexual dysfunction.

At a time of mounting computer hacking threats, the incident offers an alarming glimpse at privacy risks as the nation moves steadily into an era in which every American's sensitive medical information will be digitized.

Electronic records can lower costs, cut bureaucracy and ultimately save lives. The government is offering bonuses to early adopters and threatening penalties and cuts in payments to medical providers who refuse to change.

But there are not-so-hidden costs with modernization.

"When things go wrong, they can really go wrong," says Beth Givens, director of the nonprofit Privacy Rights Clearinghouse, which tracks data breaches. "Even the most well-designed systems are not safe. ... This case is a good example of how the human element is the weakest link."

Southern California Medical-Legal Consultants, which represents doctors and hospitals seeking payment from patients receiving workers' compensation, put the records on a website that it believed only employees could use, owner Joel Hecht says.

The personal data was discovered by Aaron Titus, a researcher with Identity Finder who then alerted Hecht's firm and The Associated Press. He found it through Internet searches, a common tactic for finding private information posted on unsecured sites.

The data were "available to anyone in the world with half a brain and access to Google," Titus says.

Titus says Hecht's company failed to use two basic techniques that could have protected the data - requiring a password and instructing search engines not to index the pages. He called the breach "likely a case of felony stupidity."

One of the patients affected was Paul Thompson, who learned of the breach from Titus.

The Sugarloaf, Calif., electrician blew out his shoulder four years ago on a job wiring up a multiplex movie theater. His insurance company denied his claim, which led to a protracted dispute. He eventually settled.

Thompson says his injury has been a "long, painful road."

Unable to afford surgery in the U.S. to fix his torn rotator cuff, he paid a medical tourism company that was supposed to schedule a cheaper procedure in Costa Rica. The company went bankrupt, however, and Thompson said he lost nearly $7,300.

To have his personal information exposed on top of that was a final indignity.

"I'm totally disgusted about everything," he said, calling the breach "another kick in the stomach."

Thomson is worried that hackers may have spotted his information online and tagged him for future financial scams. He contacted his bank and set up a fraud alert with the credit reporting agencies.

He says the prospect of all health records going electronic - which federal law mandates should happen by 2014 - "scares the living hell out of me."

When mistakes occur, the fallout can be more severe than the typical

breach of email addresses or credit card numbers.

In the wrong hands, health records can be used for blackmail and public humiliation. The information can also be used by insurance companies to inflate rates, or by employers to deny job applicants.

Usually when personal data are exposed, it’s the result of a network break-in by a hacker or a theft of computer equipment. Sometimes, it can be a simple case of someone mishandling the information.

Leaks are more likely the more data are passed around within the health industry’s increasingly interconnected networks.

Dozens of companies can be authorized to handle a single person’s medical records. The further away from the health care provider the records get, the flimsier the enforcement mechanisms for ensuring the data are protected.

That’s exactly what happened at Hecht’s company. "Our internal security policies and procedures weren’t followed," Hecht says. "When we were notified, we took immediate steps to remediate the situation and took long-term steps to make sure it never happened again."

The firm has since put the information behind a password, an approach that has its own security risks.

Hecht declined to go into further detail about how the information ended up online. He says many of the Social Security numbers and basic details about people’s injuries were part of a database his firm compiled from information regularly sent by the state.

Patricia Ortiz, spokeswoman for the state Division of Workers’ Compensation, says doctor’s notes and other documentation in such cases are publicly available, but they have to be requested one by one.

The state stopped including Social Security numbers in those files in 2008; the exposed data came from older files.

Ortiz said that once workers’ compensation information leaves the state’s control, its security is the recipient’s responsibility.

California, like most states, has a law requiring companies to notify consumers when their information has been breached. Hecht did not return calls from the AP seeking an update on how many patients had been notified.

Large-scale medical data breaches have been on the rise in recent years.

In one of the biggest, government health data was at risk in 2006 when a laptop with data on 26.5 million veterans was stolen from a government employee’s home. The computer equipment was recovered, and the FBI said the sensitive files weren’t accessed.

This year, hard drives containing health histories, financial information and Social Security numbers of 1.9 million Health Net insurance customers disappeared from an office. State regulators launched investigations into Health Net’s security procedures.

The California company declined to comment, saying the incident was still under investigation.

The latest incident is "an eye-opener, and we’re going to get eye-opener after eye-opener," says Jim Dempsey, a security and public policy expert at the Center for Democracy & Technology.

As instances of data mishandling become more commonplace, government officials may seek greater control over security policies of companies with access to health care records that aren’t currently regulated.

"It should be yet another warning bell for companies: You’ve got your reputation on the line, and you’re also facing enforcement action if you don’t pay attention to the security of the data you collect and process," Dempsey says.

The Collar Bomber’s Explosive Tech Gaffe

The man who claimed to have attached a bomb collar to an Australian high school student two weeks ago thought it would be a good idea to leave a ransom note on a USB stick looped around her neck. What he probably didn’t realize is that he also left his name, hidden deep in the device’s memory.

Court documents unsealed Tuesday describe the harrowing Aug. 3 incident, which began when a man broke into Madeline Pulver’s bedroom wearing a striped balaclava and wielding a black aluminum baseball bat. He told her to sit down and chained a black box around her neck.

He also draped a purple lanyard over the terrified girl with a note saying that the black box was a bomb. The note included ransom instructions for Pulver’s family, telling them to e-mail a Google address - dirkstraun1840@gmail.com - for further instructions. Also on the lanyard was a 4GB USB stick that contained a digital version of the note, saved as a pdf file.

The next 10 hours were a gruelling ordeal for the girl before a Sydney police bomb squad was able to determined that the threat was a hoax. But a closer look at the USB drive turned up a couple of files that the criminal thought he’d deleted. One of them, a version of the ransom note written in Microsoft Word, contained metadata about the document’s author, including his name: "Paul P."

On Monday, U.S. authorities arrested Paul "Doug" Peters, 50, in La Grange, Kentucky, seeking to extradite him to Australia to face kidnapping and breaking-and-entering charges. It’s not clear why Peters attempted such a bizarre crime, but U.S. prosecutors say he once worked for a company linked to Pulver’s family. The girl’s father, Bill Pulver, is the CEO of voice recognition software company Appen Butler Hill.

Police collected footage from surveillance cameras in a library where a computer was used to access the Gmail account. The footage, along with the USB drive and circumstantial evidence, such as purchases made around the time of the incident, link Peters to the crime, prosecutors say.

Even if the collar bomber had known his name was on the USB drive, it would have been very hard to remove it, according to Frank McClain, an independent computer forensics expert.

As computer geeks and investigators know, when users delete a file from

a computer the file isn’t deleted immediately from the hard drive. Instead, the computer takes note that the area of the disk where the file is stored is now available to be written over. So investigators can often recover at least snippets of data from files that are supposed to have been deleted.

With flash drives things are more complex, thanks to mechanisms built into the drives to prolong their lifespan. Because flash memory cells stop working after they’ve been overwritten too many times, flash devices use tricks called "wear leveling" to even out how the memory cells are used. A side effect of wear levelling is that it is "almost impossible" to completely erase data from a flash device, McClain said.

That can come in handy for people trying to recover photos or other files they’ve accidentally deleted, and there are many tools <http://www.diskinternals.com/uneraser/>, some of them free <http://www.piriform.com/recuva>, to help recover their data.

The collar bomber’s first mistake was thinking he could delete something completely from his USB stick. But he also erred by not altering the metadata in his Word document. When Word saves a document, it automatically saves data, such as the user’s login name, as part of the file. Office 2007 users can see this metadata by hitting the Office button, then "Prepare" and "Properties."

Survey Says Facebook Leads to Teen Drug Use

Video games often get blamed for violent behavior in children. But Facebook is taking its share of the blame for kid troubles. The latest survey connecting Facebook use with a negative results comes from the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University.

According to the National Survey of American Attitudes on Substance Abuse XVI: Teens and Parents, American teens ages 12 to 17 who spend any time on social-networking sites in a typical day are at increased risk of smoking, drinking and drug use.

"The relationship of social-networking site images of kids drunk, passed out, or using drugs, and suggestive teen programming to increased risk of substance abuse offers grotesque confirmation of the adage that a picture is worth a thousand words," said Joseph A. Califano Jr., CASA’s founder and and former U.S. Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare.

According to the survey, compared to teens who spend no time on social-networking sites in a typical day, those who do are five times likelier to use tobacco, three times likelier to use alcohol, and twice as likely to use marijuana.

The survey also reveals that 40 percent of all teens surveyed have seen pictures on Facebook, MySpace or other social-networking sites of kids getting drunk, passed out, or using drugs. Half of teens who have seen pictures of kids drunk, passed out, or using drugs on Facebook and other social-networking sites first saw such pictures when they were 13 years old or younger. And more than 90 percent first saw such pictures when they were 15 or younger.

Compared to teens that have never seen pictures of kids getting drunk,

passed out, or using drugs on social-networking sites, teens that have seen these images are three times likelier to use alcohol, four times likelier to use marijuana, four times likelier to be able to get marijuana, almost three times likelier to be able to get controlled prescription drugs without a prescription, more than twice as likely to be able to get alcohol in a day or less, and much likelier to have friends and classmates who abuse illegal and prescription drugs.

"The time has come for those who operate and profit from social-networking sites like Facebook to deploy their technological expertise to curb such images and to deny use of their sites to children and teens who post pictures of themselves and their friends drunk, passed out, or using drugs," Califano said. "Continuing to provide the electronic vehicle for transmitting such images constitutes electronic child abuse."

Eighty-seven percent of parents said they think spending time on social-networking sites doesn't make it more likely their child will drink alcohol, and 89 percent felt it would not make their child more likely to use drugs. They may be right.

"The fact that teens who are using drugs are also using Facebook is not a causation of the drug use, it's merely a correlation of the drug use. That's a radical difference," said Brad Shimmin, a senior analyst at Current Analysis. "These Facebook users may have other aspects of their lives that contribute to this statistic. I seriously can't see this as statistically saying that Facebook is causally associated with drug use."

Missouri Teachers' Union Sues Over Facebook "Friends" Law

Missouri teachers sued to repeal a law that bans them from "friending" students in a case that may have national implications.

The Missouri State Teachers Association Friday said educators believe proposed law is unconstitutional and too vague, and are seeking an injunction against the law, which is set to take effect on August 28. Many teachers complain the law will hurt their ability to keep in touch with students for classroom purposes, personal problems or even emergencies.

"Teachers cannot know with confidence what conduct is permitted and what is prohibited, and thereby 'chills' the exercise of first amendment rights of speech, association, religion, collective bargaining and other constitutional rights," the association said in its lawsuit, filed against the state, governor and attorney general.

The law, approved earlier this month, prohibits teachers from adding students as Facebook "friends" or otherwise privately communicating with them on any social media site.

The social networking restrictions are part of a broader law created after an investigation found 87 Missouri teachers between 2001 and 2005 lost their licenses because of sexual misconduct. Some were fired because they were exchanging explicit online messages with students.

Under the new law, teacher-student contact is allowed on sites visible to parents, administrators or the public, such as open Facebook fan pages. Teachers and students can also e-mail and text, just as long as they copy another person on the message, said Missouri State Sen. Jane Cunningham,

one of the bill’s co-sponsors.

But teachers in the state said most of their private communications with students are education-related and helpful for students. Also, it noted teachers regularly use non-work-related sites as an "important avenue" to contact students during emergencies and to help students with problems including bullying.

Missouri’s law may reflect growing nationwide concern about young people using Facebook and social media sites. While Facebook’s official policy states only people older than 13 years of age can use the site, more than half of all children between the ages of 9 to 12 have used the social networking site, and the numbers are climbing every year. This has led to experts being concerned that pedophiles, bullies and other people who want to harm children could target them through social media sites.

Meanwhile, teachers in Missouri say they are also concerned about youths’ online safety, but argue laws prohibiting them from communicating with students take away a vital education tool and paint them all as potential molesters.

As use of social media sites continues to grow with young people and adults alike, more school districts may enact policies to outline acceptable Internet use that will keep children safe and protect teachers from accusations of wrongdoing. Until that happens, teachers are well advised to take care to use social media sites when communicating with their students, and parents may need to take more care monitoring their children’s online activities.

Details of Sony’s S1 PlayStation Tablet Revealed

Technology blog Engadget has uncovered additional details about one of Sony s forthcoming tablets, previously announced as the S1 tablet.

"The official name of the S1 is the Sony PlayStation Tablet S," revealed Engadget, adding that Sony is "currently projected to bring its 9.4-inch (1280x768) screen to market in the first two weeks of September."

In April Sony announced that its S1 tablet would run version 3.0 of Google s Android operating system but Engadget believes the touchscreen device will ship with the newer Android 3.1. Honeycomb OS "with an eye towards upgrading to Ice Cream Sandwich once that’s available."

The S1 is designed for media consumption with a 9.4-inch display, two cameras and a curved-top, "off-center design" that is conducive to extended viewing sessions.

Sony has previously said that the tablets will be able to "smoothly access digital content including videos, games and books through Sony’s premium network services and more, on-the-go at any time."

Engadget provided further details about the S1 s connectivity adding that it will provide seamless access and control of all devices in the home thanks to integrated WiFi, DLNA-compatibility and an IR blaster.

Both tablets will have access to Sony s existing Qriocity music and video streaming service and readers will be able to download digital titles from

Sony s Reader Store.

Engadget did not provide any details about Sony s second book-like dual-screen S2 tablet.

"What we don’t know yet is [the Sony PlayStation Tablet S s] final price - we’d heard $599 previously - but there should be more to say about that and the clamshell S2 tablet soon," wrote Engadget.

It will be interesting to see how Sony fares in the tablet war, considering its tablets are not expected to be launched until mid-September 2011.

HP has already announced its intention to leave the tablet game after its first WebOS-based TouchPad tablet failed to gain traction in the lucrative tablet market against Apple s second edition iPad and the onslaught of Android-based rivals from LG, HTC, Motorola, Samsung, and Archos.

Interestingly, consumers have been clambering to get their hands on one of the discontinued HP TouchPads since the prices dropped from $499.99 to $99.99 in a so-called "fire sale."

IBM Building Largest Drive Ever

It wasn’t that long ago that desktop and notebook computers came with just enough hard drive space to get you by. These days, however, most new systems come with ample storage space for the majority of the population, but power users still might find their drives filling up quite quickly with music, movies, and games. But fear not, media lovers, IBM can build you a data drive with 120 petabytes of storage to hold every music, movie, and picture you’ve ever seen - and all you need is a deep bank account and a team of computer scientists to build it.

The ambitious project is currently underway at IBM, where researchers are working with 200,000 individual hard drives to create the single largest digital storage space known to man. When complete, the drive will have 120 million gigabytes of capacity, which is enough room to store roughly 24 million feature length HD movies. The epic drive also allows old or broken components to be swapped out without losing any data or requiring costly downtime.

IBM is crafting the custom storage center for an unnamed client that needs to perform massive simulations. The company hasn’t revealed the cost of the project, but with IBM engineers taking on the task, you can bet it’s not being built for a home office.

Half of US Adults Using Social Networks

Half of US adults are using social networks such as Facebook, Myspace or LinkedIn, according to a survey published Friday.

The survey by the Pew Research Center’s Internet and American Life Project found that 65 percent of adult Internet users in the United States use social networks.

That translates into 50 percent of the entire US adult population, Pew said.

Just eight percent of Internet users used social networks in 2005, according to the Washington-based Pew.

"Social networking sites continue to cement their place as a significant part of mainstream online life," said Kathryn Zickuhr, a co-author of the report.

The survey found that social networks are more popular among women with 69 percent of online women visiting social networks compared to 60 percent of men.

Pew said social network use is most prevalent among the young but 33 percent of adult Internet users aged 65 and older now use the sites, up from 26 percent a year ago.

"The graying of social networking sites continues, but the oldest users are still far less likely to be making regular use of these tools," said Mary Madden, a co-author of the report.

Pew said 83 percent of US Internet users between the ages of 18 and 29 use social networks, 70 percent of 30 to 49 year olds, 51 percent of 50 to 64 year olds and 33 percent of those aged 65 and older.

Forty-three percent of online adults visit a social network on a typical day, Pew said, making only email and using a search engine more frequent daily online activities.

Sixty-one percent of adult Internet users use email on a typical day and 59 percent use a search engine.

The survey of 2,277 US adults was conducted between April 26 and May 22 and has a margin of error of plus or minus 2.4 percentage points.

Social Suicide is Painless

Have you had it with social networking? Are you tired, nay, exhausted, by the endless streams of updates from people you hardly know on subjects you couldn’t care less about?

Have you had it up to here with Ashton Kutcher and lost all interest in what the White House has to say in 140 characters or less?

Have you discovered that telling people where you are is a pointless task because, in reality, all those people really only care about where they are?

If that sounds like you, how about committing social suicide? Yep, there’s a Web app for that: The Web 2.0 Suicide Machine!

With just a few clicks the Suicide Machine will "Kevork" your accounts on any or all of Facebook, Myspace, Twitter, and LinkedIn!

The chaps who run the Suicide Machine claim that doing this yourself would take something like nine and a half hours whereas they can do the same

thing in a mere 52 minutes! And they'll do it for free!

An interesting aspect of the Suicide Machine is that the service also changes the passwords of your accounts to something you won't know so that you can't attempt to use those accounts again! They save you from social yourself!

Come on, you know you've had enough! How long can you stand it?! Commit social suicide today!

=~=~=~=

Atari Online News, Etc. is a weekly publication covering the entire Atari community. Reprint permission is granted, unless otherwise noted at the beginning of any article, to Atari user groups and not for profit publications only under the following terms: articles must remain unedited and include the issue number and author at the top of each article reprinted. Other reprints granted upon approval of request. Send requests to: dpj@atarinews.org

No issue of Atari Online News, Etc. may be included on any commercial media, nor uploaded or transmitted to any commercial online service or internet site, in whole or in part, by any agent or means, without the expressed consent or permission from the Publisher or Editor of Atari Online News, Etc.

Opinions presented herein are those of the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the staff, or of the publishers. All material herein is believed to be accurate at the time of publishing.